

A Story of Compassion

USDA Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

The New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Program

Trenton, New Jersey

One of the main goals of President Bush's Faith-based and Community Initiative is to break down the barriers that prevent the army of compassion from fulfilling its mission: to provide services to those in need. The challenge that he has put forth to those who administer these programs in Federal, State, and local governments is to find creative ways to enable those in faith based and community organizations to compete equally for access to funds.

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services met this challenge with an innovation in the application process for the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in their state. The WIC program is a state-administered U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrition assistance and education program serving the youngest residents and their families at risk for poor nutrition and medically related health problems. Organizations can apply to be WIC service providers in their communities. State officials realized that these organizations were spending more time processing grant applications than they were actually delivering the services supported by their grant. For example, the amount of paperwork required for a typical grant application could exceed 20 pages and it could take weeks to collect and process the supporting documentation.

It was evident that flexibility and creativity were needed to reduce the burden on smaller organizations. The solution was the New Jersey Mini-Grant Application, which simplifies the grant process and relies on the discretion of the programs that provide the services to make the funding decisions. Qualifying organizations seeking \$25,000 or less in funds for outreach, transportation, equipment, staffing, and supplies can now use this

The grant document is simple, straightforward, and provides greater access to funding necessary to deliver WIC services.

The results of this effort are beginning to show promising results. While the program is still in its early stages, enthusiasm and excitement is growing as word spreads. For instance, a mini-grant awarded to an organization in Elizabeth, New Jersey to operate as an alternative site for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program allowed over 1,400 people to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. One program official noted that "increasing access increases participation" and that "this process allows us to do just that."

